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ABSTRACT

Research studies agree that the teacher, above any other factor, is the key to successful reading instruction. Therefore, in order to improve reading achievement of pupils in any ethnic group, one should look first at the teacher, paraprofessional, tutor or volunteer and his training. New developments such as microteaching, self-analysis of one's own recorded teaching, pre- and in-service training, and competency based models for training reading teachers seem promising; also encouraging are the training programs for paraprofessionals promoted and fostered by national reading organizations. The final crucial concern is that teachers of reading evidence creativity, imagination, flexibility, and a sensitivity to children. (AW/MF)

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CRITICAL ISSUES IN READING INSTRUCTION AMONG BLACK TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: PERSONNEL AND TRAINING

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CRITICAL ISSUES IN READING INSTRUCTION AMONG BLACK TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: PERSONNEL AND TRAINING

Symposium IX

Many recent research investigations substantiate the claim that the teacher is the most significant factor in determining whether children will be successful in learning to read. This allegation does not say that materials and methods are of no consequence but rather to imply that the artful teacher is the essential varible in a successful program. Evidence to support this generalization comes from many respected sources. Harris and Morrison (6, p.339) reported in their CRAFT Project that differences in mean reading scores within each method were larger than differences between methods and approaches. They concluded, "the results of the study have indicated that the teacher is far more important than the method. Costly procedures such as smaller classes and provision of auxiliary personnel may continue to give disappointing results if teaching skills are not improved."

Ramsey (7, p.153) evaluated three grouping procedures for teaching reading. He concluded that, "The thing that the study probably illustrates most clearly is that the influence of the teacher is greater than that of a particular method, a certain variety of materials, or a specific plan of organization. Given a good teacher other factors in teaching reading tend to pale to insignificance."

Bond and Dykstra (2, p.211) in their final report for the coordinating center for the first grade studies concluded, "future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials. The tremendous range among classrooms within any method points out the importance of elements in the learning situation over and above the methods employed. To improve reading instruction it is necessary to train better teachers of reading than to expect a panacea in the form of materials."

The aforementioned findings suggest that attention must be paid to the ways in which teachers can be better prepared to <u>teach</u> reading. "They also suggest that it is futile to look for simple panaceas independent of the teaching situation" (5, p.114).

We have substantiated the allegation that the teacher is the key to the improvement of reading instruction. Where do we go from here?

According to Fay (5, p.119), "the first and most obvious place is teacher education." To improve pupil achievement in reading, one should look first at the teacher, paraprofessional, tutor, or volunteer and his training. "This, then, puts the responsibility squarely upon the shoulders of those who are engaged in teacher education, both pre- and in-service teachers

of methods courses, supervisors of practice teaching, and school- and system-wide reading supervisors, both elementary and secondary" (1, p.240).

What teacher characteristics or teaching behaviors tend to differentiate the effective teacher of reading from the ineffective one? The volumes of behaviors ostensibly do not contain the answers. Generally, the described ghost-like, invisible character does not exist. "She (he) has been found to be cooperative, sympathetic and poised. She is well-groomed, healthy, imaginative, and cooperative. She gets along well with her co-workers and her principal, and gets her reports in on time" (1, p.241). Fay (5, p.119) comments that if the goal is that all should learn, "...the teacher must be prepared to be a master diagnostician capable of determining what is needed to make it possible for those many children whose needs are demonstrably different from those clustered in the middle of the group. The answer is not to be found in discussing method A versus method B, but rather in determining what to do to make it possible for learners to learn." This quality makes it imperative that the teacher be "a master decision-maker selecting this approach and that material, using this device or that person - paraprofessional or specialist - to insure that students are progressing toward clearly defined goals" (5, p.119).

Teacher education programs in colleges and universities are changing. Professional organizations as International Reading Association, College Reading Association and the National Reading Center, headed by competent specialists, are working assiduously toward preparing definitive volumes on the preparation of teachers and auxilliary personnel to teach reading and reading-related activities. New developments such as microteaching, self-analysis of one's own recorded teaching, pre- and in-service training, and competency based models for training teachers of reading

appear promising in increasing the effectiveness of reading personnel and training.

Auxiliary personnel such as teacher aides, paraprofessionals, tutors and volunteers represent a critical issue in reading and in particular that of personnel and training. The IRA Paraprofessionals and Reading Committee and the National Reading Center are working cooperatively in efforts to promote and foster competency-based training programs for volunteers and/or paraprofessionals. The work of Ellson and his colleagues (4) indicates that when trained and directed in their efforts, tutors and paraprofessionals have much to contribute to the school's success in teaching reading.

The national right to read effort, national committees and commissions and professional organizations have all been launched, or organized to find ways to better prepare teachers to teach reading. "One can truly view the future with optimism as these efforts reflect a more general ferment that will most certainly lead to change" (5, pp. 120-121).

A final, but by no means the least, critical issue concerning personnel and training is the inclusion of characteristics in human relations and the affective domain. There is sufficient evidence available now that minority ethnic children will learn to read if they are taught and that they will not learn if they are approached as if they cannot learn. If minority ethnic children "are taught, accepted, respected, and approached as if they are human beings, the average performance of these children may approach and evenutally reach the norm performance of other human beings who are so taught" (3, p. 188).

Teaching strategies and skills are important. Teachers need to know

them. In addition, they need to be creative, imaginative and flexible so they can think on their feet and try a variety of approaches to reach children and to develop lifetime readers.

Teachers need to know more about students, their abilities, their interests, their attitudes, their experiences and their needs.

Teaching should begin with a concept of reality. Reality is the concept of being now. This "reality is a philosophy that recognizes children as wonderful creations who bring certain feelings, certain abilities, certain experiences to the classroom. Life out of the classroom may be far more significant than life in the classroom, and the teacher should bring the two together. Only the teacher who takes the time to understand the child, his world, his skills, his values and his hopes can ever make school, learning, and reading a magical, marvelous, meaningful experience for each child" (8, p.301).

The critical issues in reading instruction concerning personnel and training are issues for teachers and students in all ethnic groups. Black teachers and students are no exceptions.

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